

An Extended Game of War

An Honors Thesis (ENG 444)

By

Tier Morrow

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Molly Ferguson

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

December 2019

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2020

Abstract

Child soldiers have been used in almost every war in history. Despite the lack of acknowledgement and the denial from government officials in most countries, child soldiers have fought alongside their adult counterparts for decades. In more recent wars, children have even been caught on film as suicide bombers, typically sent by their parents to confuse and kill. The analysis of *Girl At War* by Sara Nović provides an inside look at the lives of child soldiers during the Bosnian Wars in particular. The novel also reveals how impactful historical fiction novels can be and how much they actually teach people. Ana's story as the main character may be fictional, but she was created based on the true stories of surviving child soldiers currently living in Croatia. I compare and contrast this novel to the retellings and memories of child soldiers to shed light on the issue, show what people are trying to do to stop the recruitment of child soldiers, and reveal the secrets of why historical fiction is so impactful.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Molly Ferguson for advising me through this project and for scheduling the extensive number of meetings with me to help narrow down my final thesis. Her help during this creative project was only a small fraction of the help and guidance I have received from my honors, English and journalism professors during my three-year career at Ball State.

I would also like to thank Dr. Amy Livingstone for believing in my project and approving it, as well as both Lisa Renze-Rhodes and Kate Elliott for their continued support and encouragement through this in-depth adventure. I would also like to thank Nicole Thomas for editing and previewing every piece of my project.

The Process Analysis Statement:

When I first heard about the theme and requirements for my senior thesis project, there were many ideas that went through my head about mapping and place, but because I am very much a small-town girl who is very family oriented, I was really interested in home and what that word means to different people. Some say, “Home is where the heart is,” while others believe home is the house where you grew up in, so I wanted to do research about the many ways people define home and if there is a way to create a firm definition of what home is as a concept. As we read different novels throughout the semester, I tried to find one that discussed the ideas of home, but it wasn’t until we read the historical fiction novel *Girl At War* by Sara Nović that I found the connections I was looking for. In the novel, the main character, Ana, struggles with leaving her home in Croatia and finding her home in the United States. Near the middle of the novel, Ana buys a plane ticket as an adult and returns to Croatia, but she finds herself culturally shocked because a lot of what she remembers from being a child has changed.

At this point I thought I had a topic for my project, so I started my research by trying to find similar stories to Ana’s that spoke to how much time someone has to be away from a certain culture in order to get culture shock upon their return, and also about how hard it can be to return to a city you have left. Instead of finding what I was hoping for, I continually found associations between displacement and child soldiers during wars like the Bosnian Wars, which the novel is centered around. Within this research, I also found information about how many of the child soldiers who were rescued from fighting in the Bosnian Wars often never made it back to Croatia, either for legal reasons or financial reasons.

With the new information I had, I began looking back through *Girl At War*, and I found that Ana’s story was both similar and different to the histories and memories I found from child

survivors who were brave enough to discuss their experiences. So, even though I originally wanted to talk about home, I decided to adapt my topic and talk about child soldiers as a whole: how they got involved in war, what war conditions were like, what countries took in refugees during the war, how stories were different or similar to Ana's.

After I had my narrowed topic, I started thinking about the way I wanted to present my information. I very easily could have used my research to write a paper, but I really wanted to show my creativity. So, because I was introduced to online story maps in the class, I decided to use the cascade method which allowed me to have more control over where information was placed, as well as the order of the content. I also wanted to use the cascade method because I thought it was very symbolic of the life of a child soldier. For some, the fighting came right to their front doors, so they joined to defend their families since their fathers were off fighting themselves. They went from children to soldiers in a matter of minutes, and with the cascade story map, a reader can fluidly scroll through and be reading a new topic in a matter of seconds. I also thought of the text as the roadblocks and the bumps in a child soldier's life. Anyone can just drag the scroll bar from the top to the bottom, but the text slow people down and sometimes stop them in their tracks just like major turning points would in real life.

For my project, I also really wanted to try to combine both my knowledge as an English major and my knowledge as a journalism major. I wanted to emphasize the true retellings of child soldiers, so when I found multiple interviews from news organizations in my research, I was really excited. But I really struggled with deciding how I wanted to present the stories. To me, they were the most interesting aspect of my project, but I didn't know if they would confuse someone who knew nothing about the topic if they were at the very top. I found myself finishing the rest of the story map before I added any of the personal accounts. When I thought I was

mostly done, I sat down and read through everything together and made edits and changes when I didn't think something fit where I put it. When I was finished, I decided to incorporate the personal stories in my project in two ways. First, I went through the research I had and pulled some of the most astonishing quotes from child soldiers. I put the quotes with the person's name and age when they got involved in the war right under the title slide of my presentation. I also included names and ages of all the children I could find who were involved and listed them even if they didn't have a quote. I decided to put these at the forefront because my whole project is about impact and uncovering hidden topics. I felt most people would hope these stories were fictional, and this would interest people into reading further, as well as make them say, "Wow." In the past, I have had many English teachers tell me that the first and the last writing in a portfolio are the most important, so that was something I really tried to be cognizant about in my project. So, the second way I incorporated real stories is through a video in the middle of the presentation and with the quote at the end of the presentation. I created book ends with the stories because I wanted them to be the first and the last words people read.

Writing this thesis really tested my research skills because it was hard to find academic sources and experts that talked about how much people learn from historical fiction. I don't think there have been any academic surveys done to determine if historical fiction is effective, but I was able to find ways that historical fiction can be impactful. The project also tested my organizational skills. I think by the end of the project I had more than five Word documents saved on my desktop with notes and thoughts I wanted to talk about. Since I made a creative story map, I was able to break my topic into sections, which really helped because I was able to look through my information and highlight each piece as I used to and went through the project. Using this method helped me know when I needed to go back to do more research; if I was

working on a section, and I found myself asking a question I couldn't find the answer to, I knew I had to do more to find the answer I was looking for. I was able to fill in the gaps I had and round out my thesis project.

The hardest part of this project was coming up with a title. I wanted something unique just like my project was, but nothing I came up with seemed to fit. My first idea was Returning to Rubble because I was playing with the idea that for most of the child soldiers who were able to return to their past homes, they only returned to rubble, but my project was more than just the adventure to get back home. I eventually decided on An Extended Game of War because it was common for children to play war and ignore the real war going on around them. This is still true today; kids pretend to shoot each other and die. The same games happened in *Girl At War* as well. So, as I was thinking about the concepts in my thesis, I thought an extended game of war was fitting because these child soldiers were often involved in the fighting for longer than they wanted to be, and they didn't have a chance to leave like they would have in a childish game. I think the title signifies the childlike outlook of war and also emphasizes how real war is.

My goal for the future is to work as an editor for a publishing company because I have a lot of passion for helping people voice their thoughts and opinions. With the completion of this paper, I hope to both inform people about a topic most government officials try to hide, but also show that I am qualified to help people write their novels, memoirs or short stories because I have taken the time to get to know different genres of writing like historical fiction. I hope to use the ideas in this paper to help make suggestions to my future clients about ways to incorporate research into historical fiction novels and offer ideas about how to make a statement by writing from different perspectives or making the main character's story more similar or different to real people. This research is important because it shows people learn about lesser-known problems

and ideas through reading, so it will be my job in the future to help the writer draft a story that is as accurate as humanly possible. Hopefully, by understanding their impact on society, writers will continue to write historical fiction novels about important historical events, and in turn, readers will continue to absorb the information they read. There are so many novels in existence like *Girl At War*, so it is up to society to continue using them for the basis of conversation. One day, maybe there will be more efficient ways to make history simpler, but for now, historical fiction novels are the most effective because they provide the whole story and keep readers' attention.

Link to Story Map Creative Project:

<https://bsumaps.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=6d3368920d204069976aad5c64bd3092>

Works Cited

- Ahmetasevic, Nidzara. "Bosnia's Child Soldiers Abandoned by the State." Balkan Insight, Balkan Transitional Justice, 28 May 2018, balkaninsight.com/2014/05/21/bosnia-s-child-soldiers-abandoned-by-the-state/.
- Alic, Aida Mia. "Bosnia's Forgotten Child Soldiers." Institute for War and Peace Reporting, IWPR, 21 Mar. 2013, iwpr.net/global-voices/bosnias-forgotten-child-soldiers.
- Boehland, Nicolette. "The People's Perspective: Civilian Involvement in Armed Conflict." Center for Civilians in Conflict, Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2015, civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Peoples_Perspectives_Bosnia.pdf.
- "Bosnia's Children of War: Focus on Europe." YouTube, DW News, 23 June 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDhkkpifGzk.
- Cowell, Alan. "Sarajevo Orphans Return, to a Bleak Future." The New York Times, The New York Times, 30 Apr. 1997, www.nytimes.com/1997/04/30/world/sarajevo-orphans-return-to-a-bleak-future.html.
- Diamond, Anna. "Can Historical Fiction Help Make Sense of the Present?" The Atlantic, Atlantic Media Company, 13 Mar. 2017, www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/02/using-historical-fiction-to-connect-past-and-present/516543/.
- Foster, Rebecca. "Child Soldiers in the Yugoslavian Civil War: Background Information When Reading *Girl at War*." BookBrowse.com, June 2015, www.bookbrowse.com/mag/btb/index.cfm/book_number/3232/girl-at-war.
- Goldstein, R. D., et al. "War Experiences and Distress Symptoms of Bosnian Children." *Pediatrics*, vol. 100, no. 5, 1997, pp. 873–878., doi:10.1542/peds.100.5.873.

- “Guide to the Optional Protocol On The Involvement of Children In Armed Conflict.” The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, Dec. 2003, www.unicef.org/protection/option_protocol_conflict.pdf.
- “Have You Heard Alice's Story?” YouTube, War Child UK, 20 Feb. 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nTh3VtnKTQ.
- “ISIS Using Children to Carry Out Terror Attacks, Allegedly.” YouTube, ABC NEWS, 22 Aug. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTkDTHnz7gI.
- Jabzy. Yugoslav War: 3 Minute History. YouTube, YouTube, 6 July 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjpxPEGTVpA.
- Mels, Cindy, et al. “The Psychological Impact of Forced Displacement and Related Risk Factors on Eastern Congolese Adolescents Affected by War.” *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 2010, pp. 1096–1104.
- “My Childhood Was Killed Too': Bosnian Museum Presents War from Kids' Perspective.” *The Mainichi*, Mainichi Japan, 12 Apr. 2018, mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180412/p2a/00m/0na/007000c.
- Nović Sara. *Girl at War: a Novel*. Random House, 2015.
- Rakela, Mirjana. “Child Soldiers Of The Balkans.” *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, 16 Nov. 2008, www.rferl.org/a/Child_Soldiers_Of_The_Balkans/1349516.html.
- Ramet, Sabrina Petra. “War in the Balkans.” *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, 15 Feb. 2017, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/1992-09-01/war-balkans.

Reslan, Ziad. "The Balkan Refugee Route – Three Years On." KENNEDY SCHOOL REVIEW, 10 Sept. 2018, ksr.hkspublications.org/2018/09/10/the-balkan-refugee-route-three-years-on/.

Ruta, Christina. "Forced to Fight, Children Suffer All Their Lives: DW: 12.02.2013." DW.COM, 2 Dec. 2013, www.dw.com/en/forced-to-fight-children-suffer-all-their-lives/a-16590697.

"The Butcher of Bosnia." YouTube, BBC Newsnight, 16 Nov. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwChX2Ih91c.

"The Conflicts." The Conflicts | International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, 2017, www.icty.org/en/about/what-former-yugoslavia/conflicts.

Tripp, Valerie. "Vitamins in Chocolate Cake: Why Use Historical Fiction in the Classroom?" Teachinghistory.org, National History Education Clearing House, 2011, teachinghistory.org/nhec-blog/24679.

"U.S. Committee For Refugees and Immigrants." USCRI, 1997, web.archive.org/web/20080315041821/http://www.refugees.org/countryreports.aspx?id=822.